

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FISHERIES IN SOME FISHING COMMUNITIES IN SOKOTO, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to investigate the participation of women in fisheries in some fishing communities in Wamakko local government area of sokoto state. It succeeded in establishing the fact that women are active though to some extent in fisheries in this area. This is as a result of the prevailing socio-cultural, as well as religious set up which revolves round task sharing. It however highlighted the fact that women's contribution in the fisheries sub-sector is necessary to improve their livelihood and by so doing, to directly help households.

INTRODUCTION

Fishing is an important occupation in Sokoto State, especially among the communities close to natural and artificial lentic water bodies and the perennial streams. Fish ranks second to beef as a major source of protein to the people in the state (Ipinjolu, 1994), but it is the cheapest and most important source to the low income earners who constitute the bulk of the population. Apart from being a source of income through job opportunities in capture fisheries and post harvest operations, and as a source of major protein supplement in the diets of the people, various fish in this area are used in the treatment of many diseases of man such as measles, whooping cough, ear infection and eye defects as well as treatment of reproductive sterility in livestock (Ipinjolu, 1994).

While the importance of fisheries resources to the people and the overall economic development can easily be appreciated, the issue as to how to develop this vital natural resource which is fast declining as a result of over-exploitation and the ever-increasing demand due to increasing human population (Bene and Heck, 2005) by encouraging the participation of womenfolk, who constitute about 50% of the population the world over and even here in Sokoto State (Census 2006). It is in order to increase the availability of fish and in turn, protein to the people, as well as add to the overall economic wellbeing of the fisher folks.

This paper assesses the participation of women in fisheries in some of the fishing communities in Sokoto State with a view to the development of fisheries against the background of sustainable fish production and poverty alleviation.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

Fishing and aquaculture are usually pictured as occupations or recreations of men hauling nets and lines in dangerous seas, piloting fishing boats, constructing fish ponds and cages and negotiating with fish traders and fisheries officials (Williams *et al.*, 2005). What these pictures miss are contributions and roles of women. Studies and closer observation of fisheries and communities are starting to put together descriptions, stories and hard statistics on the contributions of women. This invisible group may in fact, contribute more in economic terms than the traditionally recognized fishers. Women are involved in all areas of the fishery sector such as production, processing and post-harvest handling as well as marketing of fish and fish products. They are also involved in other activities such as financing of fishermen through loans and grants for procurement of fishing gears. They have also been noted for the purchase of boats and hire of male crew to operate them. They therefore form a backbone for the artisanal fisheries of the nation (Fregene, 2006).

Tradition, culture, convention, laws and administrative double-dealing have all conspired to defeat fisheries development, because a significant portion of its society is ignored, under-utilized or suppressed—that is the women (UNESCO, 1995). Although in technologically advanced jobs and other occupations human resources may be quantitatively and qualitatively abundant and so some may be unutilized, in fisheries all human resources are needed to achieve maximum success (Medina-Pizzali, 1988).

However, extent of women involvement in fisheries operations varies between different ethnic groups,

religions, cultures norms and values of society. Religion plays an important role in the activities of women in various sectors of agriculture, fisheries inclusive. For example, Muslim women can only perform indoor agricultural activities such as processing and storage, while Christian women can perform both indoor and outdoor activities such as planting, fertilizer application, harvesting and marketing of agricultural and fisheries products (Adebusoye, 1991)

ROLE OF WOMEN IN FISHERIES IN SOME FISHING COMMUNITIES OF SOKOTO

Due to socio-cultural as well as religious beliefs, women in sokoto are generally not engaged in outdoor activities, fisheries inclusive. This is because the task sharing provides that it is the duty the men to provide all the material needs of the women such as food, shelter, fetching water from the nearby streams, medical care, paying of children's school fees as well as all other financial responsibilities and outdoor duties. The women on the other hand are responsible for all household chores such as food preparation, child care, cleaning, home maintenance and all other related activities. This is why there is very low participation in fishing activities in all the seven fishing communities visited.

The fishing communities are Bakin gulbi, Kwalkwalawa, Maginawa, Dundaye, Rafi, Kandarni and Gunfa, which are all located in Wamakko Local Government. Only in three out of these seven communities are women found playing any role in fisheries activities

These are Bakin gulbi, where three women are found to be participating; Kwalkwalawa, also with three women and Gunfa, with only one woman participating.

Activities that these seven women engaged in range from fixing hooks to the fishing rods and lines, mending nets for their husbands as well as other fishermen, buying and selling fish to people in nearby non-fishing villages, frying of unsold fish caught by their husbands which will be sold later. The women also give loans to their husbands to purchase fishing gear when the need arises. In all these activities the women are paid for services rendered and are thus able to earn their income. Other economic activities the women engage in include rice and groundnut processing, livestock rearing, as well as petty trading.

It was observed that almost all the fish caught by the fishermen is sold directly to middlemen. The fishermen usually take the biggest catch home for consumption. In some cases where fish could not be sold fresh, the fishermen keep the fish in commercial freezers till the next day, as most of the fishing villages are connected to national grid.

In all of the fishing communities under study, there was not even a single fish farm or any form of aquaculture. The fishermen were however aware of the existence of fish farms in other areas and they believe that fish farming can be a lucrative business. They lamented that due to the sandy nature of the soils in this region, earthen ponds are not feasible, while concrete ponds will be too expensive to construct.

When asked how they view the participation of their wives in their fishing activities, all the fishermen were found to be highly appreciative, especially in the area of mending nets and setting the bait line and hooks, as it gives them chance to concentrate on fishing.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Fisheries is an important sub-sector of the Nigerian economy. The various participants in this sub sector are important contributors to the economic development of this country. Women are actively involved in the processing, distribution and marketing of fish products mainly in the traditional artisanal fisheries sub sector. Data on the roles played by women in fisheries from the southern part of this country is available to some extent, but information from the northern part, especially sokoto is completely lacking. Due to financial constraints, this study could not go beyond this level. I therefore suggest that more work should be carried out in order to obtain data on the participation of women in fisheries in sokoto state as a whole.

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COUNCIL HON AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fishing is an important sub-sector of the Nigerian economy. The sub-sector is a source of income and employment to the economic development of the country. Women are active in the sub-sector, and their participation is increasing. The sub-sector is a source of income and employment to the economic development of the country. Women are active in the sub-sector, and their participation is increasing. The sub-sector is a source of income and employment to the economic development of the country. Women are active in the sub-sector, and their participation is increasing.